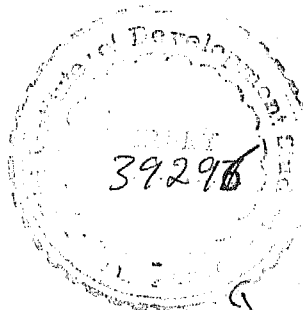


Working Paper No.172

***COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND
EFFECTIVENESS OF THE VILLAGE
EDUCATION COMMITTEE***

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2001

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE VILLAGE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

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It has been proved beyond doubt that education plays a very significant role in the development of individuals as well as the society as a whole. Since primary education serves as the very foundation for the attainment of higher education, its role becomes even more important. It is for this reason that the government is committed towards the goal of universalisation of Primary Education. The government of Uttar Pradesh has been making investments in the field of primary education since the inception of planning. Expenditure on primary education was Rs.13 crore during the First Plan and Rs.839 crore during the Eighth Plan. As a result of these expenditures the state government has been able to take positive steps in the field of primary education and some success has been achieved in increasing enrolment rates, total number of schools and number of teachers. Even the aim of setting up of one primary school within one kilometre of every village has very nearly been achieved.

Act 45 of the Indian Constitution clearly states that within 10 years of attaining Independence, provision should be made to provide compulsory education to all upto 14 years of age free of cost. Unfortunately even after 52 years of Independence and considerable investment in the field of primary education, this objective has not yet been achieved. The overall literacy rates indicated by the census of 1991 shows that in the case of UP the percentage is 41.60 and at the all India level it is 52.21. Literacy among

males and females stood at 55.73 and 25.31 per cent respectively in the state while the corresponding all India figures were 64.13 and 39.29 per cent respectively. The literacy levels in rural areas are even lower and thus the goal of attaining Universalization of Primary Education by 2000 AD as envisaged in the National Education Policy of 1986 is only a dream.

To ensure the spread of education in the state, particularly in the rural areas, it is essential to have a properly developed administrative machinery and requisite infrastructure spread over the entire state. This has been more or less achieved as a result of the regular investments made in the field of primary education. However, what is equally important is to ensure people's participation by making them aware about the significance of education. Once people become aware of the role education can play in their lives and that of their children, then the goal of achieving universalisation of Primary Education will become a reality. It was probably with this in mind that the concept of introducing education committees starting from the district level and going down to the village level was conceived of. An amendment was made in the Panchayat Raj Act with a view to decentralize the planning process and the Village Education Committee (VEC) was brought under the Panchayat Raj System to ensure decentralization even in educational planning with the help of people's participation.

The Uttar Pradesh Basic Shiksha Ordinance was passed in 1972 and amended in 1977-78 and under it the Basic Shiksha Parishad was formed to look after basic education in the state. It was decided to have three-tier education committees.

- (i) **District-level Basic Shiksha Committee** comprising of ten members. President of Zila Parishad was to be its President and the Basic Shiksha Adhikari its Member-Secretary;

- (ii) The Nagar Basic Shiksha Samiti to be formed for each Nagar Mahapalika, Nagar Palika Notified Area or Town Area. Even this committees were to have ten members. The President of this Committee is the Nagar Pramukh or the President of the Town Area or Notified Area and the Member-Secretary will be the Shiksha Adhikshak.
- (iii) Village Education Committee (VEC). This was to comprise of five members. The Village Pradhan to be its President, the Headmaster of the Basic School to be its Member-Secretary and 3 Members who will be selected by the Deputy Inspector of schools. These will be guardians of children enrolled in the basic school and comprise of two males and one female.

Another government order was subsequently issued on April 27, 1981 through which the formation of the Village Education Committee was enlarged to eleven members namely :

Pradhan of Gram Panchayat	President
Up-Pradhan	Member
Elected SC Member of Panchayat	Member
Elected ST Member of Panchayat	Member
Elected Female Member of the Panchayat	Member
Elected Member of the Panchayat	Member
Three Guardians of children nominated by Deputy Inspector of Schools	Member
One Member to be nominated by the Pradhan from Among Workers of Nehru Yuvak Dal/Mahila Mandal/NGO	Member
Headmaster of the Basic School	Member Secretary

Then again on 15.5.1993 another government order was passed and this restores the VEC members to the five as indicated earlier. This was again altered and presently the VEC has 12 members. The members are the same as indicated in the

GO of 1981 with the change that the additional member would be the parent of a handicapped student. In this way the VEC structure has been altered over the years and it has been either a five members committee or a 11-12 member one. Over the years the VECs have also been given a greater role to play in the education system of the village with a view to bringing about qualitative changes in education.

The main functions and responsibilities of the VEC are as follows:

- (1) To ensure 100 per cent enrolment of children in the school going age group 6-11 years;
- (2) In case children in 6-11 years age group are not going to a regular school they should be sent to some non-formal education centre;
- (3) To ensure that dropout rates are minimised by assuring retention;
- (4) To ensure proper use of maths and science kits provided under the Operation Blackboard scheme;
- (5) To have special focus on SC/ST and OBC children and the girl child;
- (6) To ensure that schools open and close on time and that students are kept busy in teaching and other activities;
- (7) To maintain the school building and keep the campus clean;
- (8) To construct new buildings and toilets and provide drinking water in schools where such facilities do not exist;
- (9) To ensure that teachers are punctual and teach regularly;
- (10) To monitor attendance of the children on a monthly basis;
- (11) To create awareness among the local people about the significance of education;
- (12) To raise funds for providing different facilities in school besides the funds available from the State Government;
- (13) To make people aware about the scholarships and other facilities available to different categories of children and provide help in obtaining them;
- (14) To advise the District Basic Shiksha Samiti regarding ways and means to bring about an improvement in the buildings and other assets of the school;
- (15) To obtain the co-operation of teachers, guardians, BDOs, health workers, Aanganwadi workers, Yuvak Mandal Dal and Mahila Mandal members in achieving the goal of education for all;

- (16) To make teaching more interesting by organizing national festivals, education camps, local festivals and cultural programmes;
- (17) To get the children regularly checked up from the locally available health officials and doctors;
- (18) To bring about awareness among the people by removing their superstitions and the existing mal-practices in the society.

It is envisaged that the VEC will hold its meetings once every month. In order to ensure that the VEC members are fully aware of their role and responsibilities they are provided training for a three-day period during which they are also made aware of the syllabus and activities other than teaching. They are also made aware about Micro-planning. Micro planning has two crucial elements:

- (a) **Village Based Planning** : This requires the involvement of the community in mobilizing people to enroll all children for the Universalization of Education and provide support to the school in financial and non-financial ways;
- (b) **School Based Planning** : This aims at making the school function effectively.

In the process of micro planning one has to look at the various grass-root institutional arrangements such as the VEC, etc. and their capacity building is essential to obtain optimal results. In UP micro planning has been initiated in all the 15 DPEP and 12 BEP districts since August 1998 and it was expected to be completed by February 1999. The VEC, primary school teachers and Nehru Yuva Kendra workers were involved in micro planning.

The VEC is also expected to draw up Village Education Plans after realizing problems, priorities and the educational needs of the village such as requirements of teachers, need for parent motivation and supervision of pedagogical aspects.

Yet another role to be played by the VEC is school mapping. The concept of school mapping is one where the existing situation of primary education in a village is depicted through a map. With the help of this map a clear idea can be had about total number of persons and families, the number of children in school going age group and those actually going to school, the number of educational institutions such as primary schools, junior high schools, non-formal educational institutions and infrastructure in the village such as bank, post office, etc. The advantage of school mapping is that it gives a very clear picture about the geographical location of the village and of the educational situation.

In this way the planners and policy makers made an effort to give powers and responsibilities to the Village Education Committee in order to ensure that they are able to gain the confidence of the village community in achieving hundred per cent enrolment and retention, ensure proper and regular teaching through the provision of requisite infrastructure and thereby attain the ultimate goal of Universalization of Primary Education.

The general impression held by people about the VECs is that they do not hold meetings regularly. Even when meetings are held only mundane matters such as finances are taken care of and nothing much is done to bring about qualitative improvements in the level of education. It was therefore found appropriate to evaluate the working of the VECs and find out the extent to which they have been successful in achieving the objectives which they are expected to fulfil. This paper is the outcome of such a study which was undertaken keeping mind some objectives such as:

- (a) To find out whether the VECs have been constituted as per the norms provided;
- (b) To study the extent to which VECs have enlisted the cooperation of the local community;

- (c) To study the role of the VECs in educational development of the Villages;
- (d) To study the role of the VECs in motivating the community in the opening and construction of new schools;
- (e) To study the interface between parents, teachers and the VEC functionaries; and.
- (f) To suggest ways to enable the VECs to function more efficiently and effectively.

The study was undertaken in two UPBEP districts of Uttar Pradesh namely Nainital and Sitapur. The criterion for selection was to identify the highest and lowest ranked districts from among the UPBEP districts from the literacy figures of 1991. Nainital and Sitapur were the highest and lowest ranked districts respectively. From each district we then selected two blocks with the help of the Basic Shiksha Adhikari and the DIET and care was taken to select one relatively remote block from each district. Once the blocks were identified then 15 efficiently functioning VECs were selected from each block with the help of ABSA's incharge of each block.

For the collection of primary education it was decided to interview four different categories of individuals and for each category a separate schedule was prepared. The different schedules were prepared for :

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|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| (a) VEC members | Four from each VEC |
| (b) Teachers | Two from each basic school |
| (c) Parents | Two from each village |
| (d) Community leaders | Two from each village |

Thus, the total sample, which we covered from the 60 selected VECs worked out to 600 individuals representing the four categories mentioned above. We will now present the highlights of the findings of our study and offer some suggestions, which we hope will assist the smooth, effective and efficient functioning of the Village Education Committee.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

We shall try and discuss the findings of our survey in the order of the specific objectives, which had been laid down at the time when the study was conceived of.

Our first objective relates to the formation of the VEC. It has already been pointed out that there are certain rules to be followed at the time of selecting the VEC members. Some are automatically selected while others are nominated. It was our effort to find out whether the selections were carried out keeping in mind the prescribed norms. The VEC members interviewed by us unanimously agreed that the selection of VEC members was done strictly in accordance to the rules laid down. Even all the teachers were in agreement with the fact that there has not been any violation of rules in the selection of the VEC. The views expressed by the VEC members as well as the teachers were confirmed by the fact that the parents as well as community leaders, which were surveyed by us were satisfied with the formation of the VEC. However, what has been indicated is that while due consideration has been given to give proper representation to each category of individuals such as one female member elected to the Panchayat and an elected Panchayat member from among the SC/ST group, the Pradhan has nominated those who were close to him. The feeling is that if the Pradhan had been fair the selection could have been of even more deserving members in the Village Education Committee.

As far as the second objective is concerned it was to find out the extent to which the VEC has been able to enlist the co-operation of the local community. On this front even the members of the VEC themselves feel that they have received partial success only since around 53 per cent respondents have reported that they have succeeded in gaining the cooperation of the local community. The reasons which have been cited for

the lack of cooperation are lack of interest among parents, lack of awareness among people, and that some people are far too busy to be able to spare time for the VEC. Even the community leaders feel that the VEC has not been very successful on this front. Interestingly, however, the parents are far less critical and feel that the VEC has been successful in creating an awareness among people about the different facilities which their children can avail in the Parishad schools. The VEC members have been striving to see to it that they can motivate the local community sufficiently such that they may be able to perform their functions smoothly. However, there is need to put in greater efforts.

The third objective of our study is probably the most crucial and acts as the litmus test for the VECs and their functioning. The objective relates to the type of role played by the VECs in the educational development of the village as seen in terms of enrolment, retention, etc. As far as the assessment of the VEC members is concerned they are happy over the fact that their efforts have given positive results and the enrolment rates have increased and along with it the dropout rates have also been controlled. A very high percentage of VEC members have also pointed out that as a result of efforts made by them the teachers have been attending school regularly and teaching as per the timetable. The teachers on the other hand do not feel very happy over the role played by the VECs in the spread of education. The reasons cited by them for their poor performance are that the VEC members are mainly Panchayat members and are individuals with a political inclination. They are, therefore, hardly interested in educational development. One very strong complaint made by the teachers particularly in Sitapur district has been that the VEC has not done anything to ensure that the strength of teachers be increased upto the minimum requirement. The argument put forward by the VEC members to counter this criticism is that they can at

the most make a request for additional teachers. The teachers will ultimately be provided by the Basic Shiksha Parishad. Even the parents are not very satisfied with the role of the VEC since 55 per cent parents have expressed their dissatisfaction in this regard. They feel that with respect to spread of education among girls and the disadvantaged group the VECs role has been even more unsatisfactory.

Our fourth objective was to study the role of the VEC in motivating the community in the opening and construction of new schools. Since our selection of VECs was based on the criterion of efficiently functioning VECs as identified by the respective ABSAs of the four selected blocks we had in our sample those VECs which did not have to make an effort towards the opening of new schools. However, what is quite evident has been that the VECs have certainly made efforts to see to it that facilities like drinking water and toilets is made available where they do not exist and in a few cases they have also been successful in obtaining funds for the construction of additional classrooms in the school, construction of boundary walls and for the levelling of play -fields. Some VECs have even been able to raise additional funds to get the schools electrified.

Our final objective was to study the interface between parents and teachers and VEC functionaries. In general the picture which is emerging is that the VECs are themselves not very happy over their role as far as establishing a proper rapport with the local community and parents is concerned. They have certainly been successful in motivating parents into increasing the enrolment rates and reducing dropout rates. They have also done enough good work to obtain the cooperation from the people in the construction and repair and maintenance of the school. For this the people have contributed financially as well as they have offered their manual labour. But the VEC members feel that they have not received the full confidence and cooperation of the

people because of their lack of interest and indifferent attitude. The VECs have however been successful in motivating teachers to be regular in attending school as well as in their teaching. The teachers on the other hand feel that the VEC has not fought sufficiently with the authorities over their genuine problems related to shortage of teachers. As far as teachers and parents are concerned the best way of developing cordial relationship is through the parent-teacher meetings and by door to door motivation of the parents by teachers particularly at the time when Bal Gadna process is on. With respect to parent-teachers meeting there is some difference of opinion between teachers and parents. Teachers feel that although parent-teacher meetings are not being held every month, they are being held once every three months or once in six months at least. Parents on the other hand have reported that when parents are invited to school on National Holidays and other occasions then only are they able to discuss the educational problems of their children. In the opinion of the parents these occasions should be kept separate and not be treated as the occasions to hold parent-teachers meetings as well. The teachers counter this argument by saying that when special need arises they do call the specific parents to point out the difficulties of the child to them. They also strongly feel that if these meetings are to be held regularly every month the parents themselves will not be attending them in full strength. That during a festive occasion like a National Holiday almost all parents are in school and this provides the best opportunity to the teachers to meet all parents.

In the light of the findings stated above we will now make an effort to offer some suggestions which will prove useful in making the functioning of the VECs more efficient.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) The strength of the VEC is presently of twelve members. This is too large and needs to be suitably reduced. It is primarily because of its awkward size that its meeting can neither be held regularly nor do all members find it convenient to attend the meetings of the VEC. It is generally felt that its strength should be reduced by half to six members only. They should include the Pradhan as its Chairman and the Headmaster as its Member Secretary. In villages which have a primary as well as the junior basic school, both headmasters should be members and the senior of the two to be the Member Secretary. The other three members should include one community leader, one SC/ST parent and one female whose child is enrolled in school. In case the village has only one school a retired headmaster or teacher should be nominated. As far as possible care should be taken to select people who are literate since they can easily understand their duties and responsibilities and also motivate the local community more effectively.
- (2) Experience of the VECs surveyed by us clearly points out towards the fact that it is impractical to hold the VEC meetings on a monthly basis. It will therefore be much more appropriate to hold meetings once in three months. However, the President and Member Secretary must meet every month to take care of routine matters. As far as matters of importance are concerned, they should be discussed only when the VEC meets in full strength and a final decision should be taken after deliberating over the issue in detail.
- (3) The VEC must ensure that the minimum facilities such as provision of drinking water, toilets and boundary wall are made available. Boundary wall in particular

is an essential need because in its absence problems of security, tress passing and entry of stray cattle create a nuisance.

- (4) Presently the VEC members are being given training for three days and this duration is quite insufficient keeping in mind the fact that besides making them familiar about their responsibilities. They are also familiarized about concepts such as Micro Planning, Village Education Plan and School Mapping. In the light of the fact that the educational level of some members will be quite low three days is not enough for the members to comprehend what was taught and then be able to implement these plans. It might not be feasible to have a long duration-training programme but the Parishad can certainly think of more than one short duration training camps where at a time only one or two concepts are explained. Moreover, the timings of these programmes should be fixed in accordance with the convenience of the VEC members.
- (5) Every year at least once a day long brain storming session should be conducted where all the Presidents and Member Secretaries of the VECs from a block must gather and discuss the various problems which they have been facing and the solution which the members found to those problems. This exchange of ideas will be extremely fruitful in achieving the goal of Universalization of Education. During these meetings it should be mandatory for the respective ABSA to be present and to take note of the problems highlighted. The ABSA should ensure that some solution is found to the genuine problems of the VECs.
- (6) The schools receive funds under the World Bank assistance for construction work. A proper plan of the Civil construction work has been prepared and it is expected that these specifications will be adhered to. Thus, the VEC must

monitor the construction work and ensure that the quality control measures are adopted. Once the work is over the Parishad should give its final clearance.

- (7) Despite the fact that a reasonable degree of success has been achieved by the VECs in ensuring a higher enrolment rate and in reducing the dropout rates, there is still room for improvement. In order to motivate parents and make them fully aware about the benefits of education the VECs must make greater efforts to promote awareness with the help of rallies, poster campaigns, appropriate film shows, puppet shows, street shows and other audio-visual publicity on a regular basis to ensure that the ultimate objectives of the VEC are achieved. Although these methods are already being adopted there is still scope for additional effort. The co-operation of the various NGOs working in the villages can be taken to meet this end.
- (8) The existing pattern of holding parent-teacher meetings needs to be re-organized and regularized. It is not feasible to hold these meetings every month because parents are unlikely to attend them on a regular basis. These meetings should, therefore, be held once in every three months and that too keeping in mind the convenience of parents. Thus, the sowing and harvesting seasons should be avoided. The present practice of holding these meetings on occasions when parents are present in school in connection with a National festival should be discontinued. This is so because parent-teacher meetings are the best way of ensuring a proper rapport between parents and teachers. The parents can not only be appraised of the problems which their children are facing but they can also be convinced into motivating other parents as well.

- (9) While the mid-day meal scheme has been conceived of to give incentive to parents and ensure hundred per cent enrolment of children in the school going age group, the scheme has a darker side as well. In the first place children who are not even 6 years old are being enrolled in the greed of 3 kgs. rations per month. This is adversely affecting the teacher-student ratio. Moreover, a large number of these small children remain absent on a regular basis but there is a constant pressure on the teachers not to make their attendance below 80 per cent. In case attendance is below 80 per cent in a month the child is not eligible to his quota of monthly rations. The VEC must look into it that only children in the school going age group are granted admission and that their attendance is at least 80 per cent before they get their monthly quota of ration.

Besides this it is only fair that the scheme of scholarships should be given on economic considerations as well. Given the government policy it is all right if children of a deprived section are being given scholarship, but even those children from the general population whose parents are below the poverty line should be eligible for scholarships.

- (10) The VECs have not been successful in focussing attention on the problems of the girl child or children from the disadvantaged group. The neglect of the girl child even today is one of the main reasons as to why the goal of hundred per cent enrolment has not been achieved. During the training period the VEC members must be properly appraised of this problem.
- (11) The funds at the disposal of the VEC are insufficient keeping in mind the overall needs of a school. Many a times decisions taken by the VEC have to be kept in abeyance because of non-availability of funds. It is not necessary that the

amount of funds be raised but whenever the VEC needs money for a genuine purpose the office of the Basic Shiksha Adhikari must give due consideration to it and release the requisite funds.

- (12) Not only does the VEC have certain responsibilities with respect to providing proper quality education but also it is equally important that the VEC should tackle social problems which plague the rural areas such as child labour, child marriage, and discrimination against the girl child. These social evils contaminate the environment in general and prevent the creation of a congenial atmosphere for education.
- (13) The VECs are presently not playing an active role in micro planning, chalking out the Village Education Plan and school mapping. These are the important functions which a VEC should be performing. Besides the stress on these aspects during the training of VEC members, the ABSAs should keep up pressure on them to carry out these activities as well.
- (14) The co-ordination between the VEC and the Panchayat is not ideal at present despite the fact that both these institutions are being headed by the same individual – the Village Pradhan. A large number of problems automatically get sorted out wherever a proper relationship exists. There is, therefore, need to adopt suitable means to ensure that proper co-ordination is maintained.
- (15) In the case of Sitapur particularly, the teacher strength is rather low and as a result the student-teacher ratio is quite adverse. Not only is this adversely affecting the quality of teaching but is also leading to resentment among the teachers against the VEC that it is not doing anything for them. The VEC members say that they do not have the power to provide extra teachers. It is for

the Basic Shiksha Parishad to ensure that adequate number of teachers are provided in the schools and the misunderstanding between teachers and VEC members is removed.

- (16) Even the VEC members have pointed out in both the districts that while they take various decisions during the VEC meetings and the suggestions are forwarded to the office of the Basic Shiksha Parishad, these recommendations generally are left unattended. This leads to a feeling of helplessness among the VEC members and they ultimately become indifferent towards their duties and responsibilities. Since the very concept of the VEC has been conceived of to improve the quality of education the suggestions put forward by it must be discussed in detail and implemented if they are useful.
- (17) In order to provide an impetus to do good work there is a scheme at present to reward the efficiently functioning VECs. It would be far more appropriate to monitor the functioning of the VECs throughout the year rather than identifying good VECs once every year. For this the officials from the office of the BSA and DIET will have to shoulder greater responsibilities.
- (18) In the Basic Shiksha Parishad offices at the block level as well as at the district level, information related to various aspects of primary education are not being well maintained. A large amount of money is being provided to the BSA office for computerization of secondary information and for developing a data bank. However, the actual situation is far from satisfactory and we were unable to obtain all the information, which we sought.

In the absence of readily available data on a time series basis it becomes extremely difficult for the policy makers to size up the exact situation and draw up

suitable policies. In fact the data which was provided separately by the block office as well as from the BSA office had discrepancies in them. It is, therefore, essential that data must be maintained properly. The VEC can see to it that school level information duly compiled related to Bal Gadna, enrolments and dropouts, strength of teachers, etc. must be sent regularly to the BRC. The BRC will compile block level information and then pass it on to the districts where block-wise data for the entire district can be stored.

To sum up, therefore, we wish to add that the concept of the Village Education Committee is very useful because it comprises of people belonging to the village itself and they can assure people's participation very effectively if only they take adequate interest in this work. Our experience after a survey of 60 efficiently run VECs leads to the obvious conclusion that wherever even if one VEC member is active, it has produced the desired results. The situation becomes even more favourable if this individual is the Pradhan himself. This is so because he leads by example and exerts a positive influence on the others and they willingly extend their full cooperation to him.

~~Our success stories are a pointer in this direction.~~

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